

Kástra Elión Vodka Is Made From Olives And Perfect For Martinis



Vodka has a reputation for being flavorless and neutral, and yet its popularity persists. Much of the marketing that drives the category is focused on lifestyle cachet, rather than aroma and taste. But this reputation is mostly outdated. Because while some brands, even a few of the best regarded, are distilled to the point of flavorlessness and lean into their neutrality, others are packing flavor and texture into each bottle. Some are even experimenting with base ingredients that go beyond the usual grains and potatoes.

[Kástra Elión](#) falls into this new crop of vodkas. It hails from Greece, where it's made from a blend of Greek olives and wheat. It's named for the ancient castle that stands guard over the hills and olive groves of Nafpaktos, the ancestral home to the vodka and the family that created it.

The brand was founded by master blender and certified flavor chemist Frank Mihalopoulos, who's spent nearly four decades in product development for companies like Baskin Robbins, Dunkin Donuts and Kahlua, and has also consulted for spirits brands including Absolut and Stolichnoff. He's joined by co-founder and son-in-law, Mike Camello, who serves as the company's president.

"We were vodka drinkers and interested in some of the European vodkas made using malted barley and rye, and those who were getting good texture in their vodkas," says Camello. They thought: Why not try making a vodka from olives?

It took about a year for Mihalopoulos to make it work. He set up a lab and acquired distillation equipment, and began testing olive varieties from all over the world. "I didn't want to be sentimentally attached to the story, but we settled on a three-variety blend that happens to come from the same region in Greece that I'm from."



It's a craft process, and the yield loss is much higher than what most vodka distillers see, but Mihalopoulos explains that tight distillation cuts are necessary to eliminate all the heads and volatile compounds introduced by the olives.

There's not a lot of sugar in olives, so the ethanol comes from the grains. Mihalopoulos is quick to point out that the olives lift up what already exists in the grain. There's no flavor contribution from the olives, and the company never set out to make olive-flavored vodka; instead, the olives contribute the vodka's trademark mouthfeel and smoothness. Before bottling, the distilled spirit is blended with spring water from Greece's mineral-rich Mount Taygetus.

Kástra Elión vodka has a very clean nose, free of any off-putting chemical notes or exaggerated alcohol burn. Aromas are sweet and savory, with vanilla and butterscotch leading the way. The palate brings mild fruit notes, citrus and a hint of pepper. It sits on the tongue and stays with you, activating the salivary glands as flavors build to more butterscotch and vanilla and some toasted bread.

Camello likes to drink Kástra Elión on the rocks with olives in it, but he acknowledges that not everyone wants to sip vodka. Fortunately, it's well-suited to Martinis. When introducing the vodka to bartenders, the brand hopes they keep drinks spirit-driven and don't go too crazy with sugar. "We want the vodka to shine and keep its mouthfeel," says Camello.

Kástra Elión recently launched its own olive brine and cocktail olives, [available individually or in a kit](#) alongside a bottle of vodka, that are meant to create the ultimate Dirty Martini. The brine and olives both hail from the same Nafaktos region where the vodka is made, so one can enlist the full trio for a very Greek, very olive-focused take on the traditional cocktail.